

*The Late Samuel Gaskell, Esq.*

Although Mr. Gaskell had retired so many years from his official duties as a Commissioner in Lunacy, his worth and ability remain fresh in the memories of many. Those who knew him in his prime will never forget his zealous endeavour to advance the interest of the insane, his sound judgment, and his practical knowledge of details acquired in the Lancaster Asylum.

Mr. Gaskell, F.R.C.S., was born in the year 1807, at War-rington. As his father died young, leaving a widow with a large family and slender means, he owed much to his mother, for it was to her self-denial and good sense that he received the best education which the locality and the times afforded. In early life he evinced a decided preference for the medical profession, but to his great disappointment the weakness of his eyes, caused by an attack of measles, induced the family doctor to discourage the adoption of medicine as his profession. The youth was, therefore, obliged to relinquish his design, and he was apprenticed for seven years to a publisher and bookseller in Liverpool. Here he had access to the best literature of the day, including that of his favourite subject, of which he was not slow of availing himself, and every spare moment was spent in study. It not only marks the confidence reposed in him by his employers, but it is a curious illustration of the difference between the present and the past, that when any important news arrived from America he was employed to convey the intelligence to London by post-chaise. These long journeys gave him further opportunities for studious reading. His master, recognising such a decided bias towards medicine, consented to remit several years of his apprenticeship, and he became free in consequence to follow his original bent. He went through the necessary curriculum at Manchester and Edinburgh, and having obtained his degree he was shortly afterwards appointed Resident Medical Officer in the Cholera Hospital at Stockport. In 1834 he was elected to the office of house apothecary at the Manchester Royal Infirmary and Lunatic Asylum. Dr. Bardsley, physician to this institution, thus wrote after Mr. Gaskell had filled the office for six years: "I have had the most ample opportunities of judging of his talents, diligence, unwearied application to his duties, practical knowledge and moral conduct. I can most conscientiously state that it is impossible for any public medical officer to have excelled him in the exercise of these qualities."

In 1840 Mr. Gaskell entered on his duties as resident surgeon to the County Lunatic Asylum at Lancaster, where his treatment of the patients, and the consequent amelioration of their condition, did him the greatest credit. He banished the instruments of restraint which may even now be seen collected together in a room in the institution. Lord Shaftesbury, at the annual meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association in 1881, stated how much he had been struck with Mr. Gaskell's management, especially with the sight of a number of female patients, each having a young child under her care, and how he determined to induce the Lord Chancellor of that day to appoint him a Commissioner on the occasion of the next vacancy. Mr Gaskell took office in 1849, and held it until 1866. As a Commissioner he was highly esteemed, both by his colleagues in office and by the superintendents of the institutions of the insane, although the latter were at times disposed to resent his very thorough and minute examination of the institutions he inspected from floor to ceiling. His influence, however, was excellent, and we can well remember the sound advice he gave to assistant medical officers to associate familiarly with patients, and accompany them in their walks in a way which, as he observed, the superintendents could not properly do. Perhaps in no particular did he effect so great a change in asylums as in the matter of dirty bed-linen, which he maintained from his own experience could be reduced to a very small item if the superintendents insisted upon proper precautions being taken with dirty patients before they retired to rest, and their being systematically roused in the night to attend to the calls of nature. It must be admitted that even now his system is not carried out in every asylum, while where it is resolutely observed, the effects are in the highest degree satisfactory.

In 1865 Mr. Gaskell's useful career was practically closed by a lamentable accident. While crossing a street he was knocked down by a vehicle, and from that time experienced so much discomfort in the head that it was not only impossible for him to pursue his work, but painful to enter into social life. Consequently he became, to a great extent, a recluse, although he maintained his mental faculties to the close of his life.

Mr. Gaskell died, at the age of 79, at his residence, Walton, Surrey, on the 17th day of March, 1886.